



FINAL STUDY REPORT

ACTON HISTORIC DISTRICT STUDY COMMITTEE

NOVEMBER 20, 1990

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INTRODUCTION

Acton, like many communities in the Commonwealth, has undergone considerable growth and change over the past several decades. With the changes have come benefits to the town's citizens. At the same time, residents have become increasingly concerned over the loss, and the continued threat of losing, much of the town's historic, small-town New England character. The Historic Districts Act, Chapter 40C of the General Laws of Massachusetts of 1960 (amended 1975 and 1983) was passed to help address just this type of situation. Its purpose is to preserve and protect the distinctive characteristics of buildings and places significant in the history of the state or its cities and towns, to maintain and improve their settings, and to encourage new building designs compatible with the existing architecture.

Under Chapter 40C, communities are empowered to create Local Historic Districts to protect the character of their historic areas. Such districts are governed by locally appointed Historic District Commissions which oversee and review substantial changes to the exteriors of buildings and sites located within those districts. Today, Local Historic Districts exist in over ninety Massachusetts cities and towns.

In this Final Study Report, the Acton Historic District Study Committee presents its findings to the Town, amended by public comment. We have found that of the many areas in Acton that might qualify as Chapter 40C Local Historic Districts, those that would benefit the most from the designation are the cores of its three remaining village centers - at Acton Centre, South Acton, and West Acton.

In our discussions with residents and property owners, we have learned that people in these areas not only wish to preserve the character of their own properties, but want to retain the character of their entire neighborhoods in the face of state, municipal, and commercial projects, and the ultimate development of open parcels of land. We have found that in similar areas in other communities, the establishment of Local Historic Districts and the accompanying involvement of a Historic District Commission has been the most effective means of doing this.

We believe that by helping to preserve what is valuable in Acton's past, Local Historic Districts will play an essential role in planning for our town's future.

ACTON HISTORIC DISTRICT STUDY COMMITTEE:

Edward Adelman
Elizabeth Conant
Anita Dodson
Anne Forbes, (Chair)
Wayne Friedrichs
Dore' Hunter
Charlie Husbands

Susan Master-Karnik, (Vice-Chair)
Whit Mowry
Sandra Schmidt, (Clerk)
Ex Officio:
Roland Bartl, Town Planner

BACKGROUND / METHODOLOGY

The Acton Historic District Study Committee was appointed by the Board of Selectmen in September of 1989 to investigate the feasibility of establishing Local Historic Districts in Acton. This is not the first time the town has examined the use of the Chapter 40C Historic District legislation as a preservation tool. In 1972 and 1973, in response to citizens' preservation concerns, a small committee met briefly to examine the issue. At that time, however, Acton lacked detailed architectural and historic information on most of its resources. Therefore, the goal was scaled down to the pursuit of another type of district - the National Register District. In 1983, after several years of work by the Acton Historical Commission, a National Register District, (a designation which recognizes an area's importance, but which does not usually afford any protection from alteration) was created for forty-four properties in Acton Center.

In 1988-89, in response to an examination of town goals undertaken in the course of establishing a town Master Plan, citizens again adopted the preservation of Acton's historic character as a primary goal for the future. Over eighty percent of residents surveyed favored Historic Districting for the three village centers. People expressed dismay over what they saw as detrimental changes, many of which had taken place in the intervening seventeen years since the Local Historic District idea was first proposed. Changes mentioned ranged from the loss of entire buildings to radical alterations that chipped away at an area's character when repeated on building after building, and the intrusion of new buildings and structures that were incompatible with the surrounding older architecture. As a result of this type of community input, the goals and objectives of the Acton Master Plan that were adopted at the 1990 Annual Town Meeting place a significant emphasis on historic preservation.

Other studies have also pointed toward the appropriateness of Chapter 40C historic districting for Acton. For one village center, South Acton, an MAPC report of 1982 recommended historic districting to help stabilize the area's core, and as a means of slowing the loss and deterioration of its historic architecture.

Fortunately, thanks to a private contribution and a matching grant from the Massachusetts Historical Commission's Survey and Planning Grants program, in fiscal year 1989-1990 the town was able to hire a team of preservation consultants to address one of the obstacles to the first districting attempt - the completion of the documentary work on the Survey and Inventory of Acton's Historic Resources. The documentation of Acton's three historic village centers is now finished, and forms both the information base for the study committee boundary recommendations and a solid factual foundation from which a future Historic District Commission would be able to work.

The Study Committee presented its Preliminary Report to the town in August, 1990. Since that time, largely in response to comments from the Massachusetts Historical Commission, Town Counsel, Town of Acton boards, commissions, and departments, and especially from the public, the Committee has revised the Preliminary Report to produce this Final Study Report.

In September the Committee hosted three neighborhood meetings for property owners in the proposed districts, at which informational brochures and questionnaires were distributed. Results of the questionnaires showed strong majority support for the establishment of Chapter 40C districts in those areas. In response to concerns expressed by commercial-property owners in the West Acton District, the Committee also held a workshop on October 29.

Citizens' comments at the meetings, as well as at the October 10, 1990 Public Hearing on the Preliminary Report, have helped to shape the Committee's final proposal. In their spoken and written comments people requested that a Commission's procedures and the application process for Certificates of Appropriateness, etc., be as streamlined and expedient as possible. They have been concerned about fairness, especially in regard to the view of a building from a public way. They have requested that a Commission's review not be so extensive so as to be burdensome to the property-owner, and should concentrate mainly on the most substantial exterior changes and character-defining architectural features. Most of those surveyed felt that paint and roof color, storm windows and doors, and changes at grade level, for instance, were of relatively minor importance to a district's character, but that new construction, major additions to existing buildings, large radio antennas and satellite dishes were of significant importance. Many respondents also mentioned the character of signs as crucial to the appearance of an area.

Many of these concerns have already been addressed by the Committee in the Preliminary Report, in which several options available under Chapter 40C were chosen. The Commission membership, (see Section 4,) takes into account both a Commission size that has proven most workable in the past, and the anticipated pool of volunteers. In choosing options for appeal procedures, (Section 7.13,) and exclusions from review, (Sections 9 and 10,) the Committee has focussed from the start on both efficiency of procedures and cost-effectiveness. Since the Preliminary Report a new Section 7.4.1, (waiver of Public Hearing,) has also been added.

In the process of revision the Bylaw has been coordinated with other town statutes, including one necessary amendment, (see Item B, which amends the Town's Demolition Delay Bylaw to give the District Commission jurisdiction over demolition proposals within the Districts.)

The Committee has also added the following provisions to the Bylaw:

- 6.1: view from the Public Way limited to the view of the building which is most relevant to the District.
- 8.2: limits Commission's power to impose dimensional and setback requirements to no more than those allowed under the maximum floor area ratio and height limitations of the Zoning Bylaw.

In addition to the above Bylaw changes, the proposed district boundaries have been slightly altered since the Preliminary Report:

- because of a clerical error, properties at #s 94 and 95 (97) Main Street were inadvertently left out of the Preliminary Report. These two have been added to the South Acton District.

- seven properties, at #s 240-242, 241, 244, 248, 249, 253, and 257 Central Street, have been dropped from West Acton, the largest of the three proposed districts.

Many public comments dealt with items that were outside the scope of the Historic Districting Bylaw as required by Chapter 40C. The Study Committee has recommended several of these to the District Commission, as follows.

RECOMMENDATIONS TO THE ACTON HISTORIC DISTRICT COMMISSION

Under Chapter 40C, a town establishes Local Historic Districts and provides for a Historic District Commission to be set up for their administration. In drawing up the Bylaw, the Study Committee outlines the overall legal structure of the Historic District Commission, including its membership, powers and duties, and the general criteria on which the Commission will base its decisions. The Study Committee is not empowered, however, to enumerate detailed design guidelines or establish all administration procedures for the districts - that is the right and duty of the Historic District Commission once it is appointed.

The Study Committee can, however, recommend certain guidelines and procedures. The following recommendations are based on comments from the Acton community, town boards and departments, and the Massachusetts Historical Commission.

1. Coordination with existing and future town statutes
No rule, procedure, policy, or guideline established by the Historic District Commission should conflict with any other town statute. Before establishing guidelines for signs, for instance, the Commission should consult both Section 7 of the present Zoning Bylaw of the Town of Acton, and any draft for amendments to that section.
2. Commission Membership
In addition to those categories required by the Bylaw, if the West Acton District is established, the Commission should seek to include one representative of the business community in its membership.
3. Application and Review Procedures
The Commission should establish streamlined review procedures wherever possible, so that many items would receive quick or automatic approval, without going through the full hearing and review process.

If a permitting-fee structure is found to be necessary, the Commission should seek to cover only normal processing costs, (postage, photocopying,

etc.) by the most direct means possible. The Commission's first consideration for funding should be to seek the remainder of the donation used to match the town's 1990 Survey and Planning Grant. Costs for notification of abutters and for any required public hearing notice should be borne by the applicant. In many communities, Historic District Commissions are funded through the town budget; some even have paid staff. In these days of fiscal constraint, however, our committee does not recommend this approach.

4. View from the Public Way

In the case of a building or structure which has frontage on more than one street, the Commission, in consultation with the property owner, should limit its jurisdiction to the view from only one public way.

5. Design Guidelines

The Commission should develop design guidelines that concentrate on the most character-defining architectural elements for historic structures, and on general aspects of massing, form, proportion, scale and materials for new construction and existing modern (or "non-contributing") buildings.

The Commission should adopt as a fundamental guide the Secretary of the Interior's Standards for Rehabilitation (revised 1990) and his Guidelines for Rehabilitating Historic Buildings (revised 1983).

In developing the Bylaw, the Committee has chosen the option of excluding several categories from the Commission's review. A few other additional categories, including antennas and exterior lighting fixtures, are permissible exclusions under Chapter 40C. Because of public concern over large antennas such as satellite dishes and those for cellular telephones, and the character of many large-scale lights for parking areas, the Committee has included these categories under a Commission's jurisdiction. It is our recommendation, however, that the Commission, in its Design Guidelines, either exclude or automatically approve certain subcategories related to these items, such as roof antennas under a certain square footage, or certain types of exterior lighting fixtures.

6. Enforcement

The Commission should seek to incorporate any fines it may charge into the non-criminal disposition procedures now in force in some other town departments. In order to invoke this option, it may be advisable to present a proposal to amend Chapter E of the General Bylaws at the Spring 1991 Town Meeting.

DESCRIPTION OF PROPOSED DISTRICTS

The Historic District Study Committee is in agreement with the general feeling expressed in the master plan public meetings that the areas of town in which the historic fabric is most pervasive and/or most threatened are the cores of its three major town centers: Acton Center, South Acton, and West Acton. It is here that the commercial, industrial and institutional activity of the town was historically concentrated, and where Acton's character as a once-small New England town is still most strongly expressed and is experienced by the largest number of people today.

ACTON CENTRE DISTRICT

Description of the Area

For the Chapter 40C Historic District, the study committee recommends including the entire National Register District "Acton Centre" and extending these boundaries south on Main Street to Taylor Road. The Register District runs along Main Street, with spokes to the north and south along Concord Road, Nagog Hill Road, Newtown Road, Wood and Woodbury Lanes. It includes 32 dwellings, 4 civic buildings, a church, a commercial building, the Town Common and monument, and 2 historic sites. There are two non-contributing buildings. The extension of this district for inclusion in a Chapter 40C district would include 10 additional dwellings. They are numbers 427, 430, 431, 433, 437, 438, 445, 446, 451 and 452 Main Street.

Nine out of ten of these properties (excluding #433 which is a ca. 1926 Colonial Revival structure) are also worthy of inclusion in the National Register as integral to the listed district and the Acton Historical Commission has identified them in its Historic Resource Survey as National Register eligible properties. These properties are eligible under criteria:

- A - contributing to an understanding of the development of the town's civic center, and
- C - representing mid-19th century architecture consistent with the buildings already included in the nomination.

These additional properties are also visually connected to the rest of the district.

The house types range from the connected farmhouse in the Federal style to the Greek Revival side-hall entry dwelling with additional dwellings and embellishments in the Italianate and Colonial Revival styles.

Proposed boundaries are delineated on the attached local historic district map.

ACTON CENTRE DISTRICT

Justification of Proposed Boundaries

Acton's first meeting house was built on Meeting House Hill in Acton Centre in 1736 and remained until 1807 after the Second Meeting House was built (at the site of today's Town Hall). From that time until 1962, the Hill was the site of a succession of Acton Centre schoolhouses.

During the 18th century, residential settlement at Acton Centre was minimal, characterized by a few large farms. When the Second Meeting House was built in 1806 and the Town Common from southwest of Concord Road to Nagog Hill Road was laid out, Acton Centre began to develop as the town's center for civic and religious activities. Impressive residences were built circling this civic center. The primary institutional buildings remaining in use in the district are the 1829 Federal/Greek Revival Chapel currently the home of the Acton Women's Club, the Congregational Church (1846 Greek Revival with 1898 Queen Anne remodelling) the 1863 Italianate Town Hall (recently expanded), the 1889 Romanesque Acton Memorial Library, and the Acton Centre Fire Station (1952 Colonial Revival, one of the area's two non-contributing structures).

Acton Centre is distinguished as the civic and institutional center of the Town of Acton as well as being the geographic center of this sprawling town. Most of Acton Centre was listed on the National Register in 1983 as the "Acton Centre Historic District" and it is logical in creating Acton's local historic districts to begin with the boundaries of that district, which is centered around the Town Hall (1863 in the Italianate style) and the Davis Monument (1851) at the center of the Town Common.

Many of the properties have undergone minor changes in the twentieth century, but most retain their original form and style, with the 20th century infill buildings compatible in style, scale and proportion.

DATA SHEETS FOR ACTON CENTER DISTRICT

Properties in the Acton Center district are listed alphabetically by street. Also included are the approximate date of construction, a brief description, historic name where applicable, and an assessment of condition. The condition assessment is stated in the context of the district, i.e. how well the property reflects, or is consistent with other area buildings in expressing the historic development of the community.

Each resource for which a Massachusetts Historical Commission inventory form has been written has an identification number; that number appears in the left-hand margin. Modern buildings that do not contribute to the historic character of a district are classified as non-contributing, and are marked "nc". Inventory forms are filed in the Acton Planning Department office, the Acton Historical Commission files, and at the Mass. Historical Commission.

Uninventoried lots within the district boundaries are listed by assessor's map and parcel number at the end of each data sheet.

CONCORD ROAD

- B-128 (nc) 7 Concord Road - Acton Centre Fire Station
1952, Colonial Revival, stucco, intact.
- B-129 8 Concord Road - J. Fletcher
ca. 1850, Greek Revival, clapboards, intact.
- B-130 12 Concord Road - Evangelical Church/Congregational
1846/1898/1966, Greek Revival/Queen Anne, clapboard, intact.
- B-131 20 Concord Road - Dole/Hapscomb/Fletcher
1846, Greek Revival/Italianate, clapboard, intact.

MAIN STREET

- B-113 427 Main Street - J. Reed
1875-1889, Greco-Italianate, clapboard, minor alterations.
- B-112 430 Main Street - J. Fletcher
ca. 1860, Greek Revival, clapboard, intact.
- B-111 431 Main Street - Jacobs/Litchfield
ca. 1850, Greek Revival, clapboard, intact.
- B-110 433 Main Street - Parsons
ca. 1926, Colonial Revival, rubblestone, intact.
- B-109 437 Main Street - Rouillard
ca. 1870, Greco-Italianate, clapboard, intact.

- B-108 438 Main Street - Horace Tuttle
ca. 1850, Greek Revival, clapboard, intact.
- B-107 445 Main Street - William D. Tuttle
ca. 1865, Italianate, clapboard, intact.
- B-106 446 Main Street - Luke Tuttle
ca. 1865, Greek Revival, clapboard, intact.
- B-105 451 Main Street - Edmunds/Davis/Wheeler
ca. 1850, Greek Revival, clapboard, intact.
- B-104 452 Main Street - ? /Tucker
ca. 1865, Greco-Italianate, Clapboard, intact.
- B-103 455 Main Street - Francis Barker/Jonas Blodgett/Fraancis Hosmer
1799/ca.1870/ca.1885, Italianate/Queen Anne, clapboard, minor alterations.
- B-102 460 Main Street - John White House
ca. 1806/ca.1870, Greek Revival/Italianate, synthetic siding, altered.
- B-101 459 Main Street - Noyes Store
ca. 1914/ca. 1918, Colonial Revival, clapboard, minor alterations.
- B-100 461 Main Street - Jones Law Office/Simon Davis
1805/ca.1850, Federal/Greek Revival, clapboard, minor alterations.
- B-99 468 Main Street - Roger Croft
1913, Bungalow, clapboard, intact.
- B-98 Main Street - The Common
1806/1840/1899, landscape, altered.
- B-902 Main Street - Davis Monument
1851, obelisk, intact.
- B-96 481 Main Street - Brooks/Noyes (mid 19th c.)
1821/ca. 1824/1876, Federal, clapboard, intact.
- B -97 472 Main Street - Acton Town Hall
1863, Italianate, clapboard, intact.
- B-95 484 Main Street - Acton Memorial Library
1889/1985, Romanesque, brick, intact.
- B-94 487 Main Street - Rev. James Jones/Cyrus Dole
ca. 1807, Federal, clapboard, intact.

- B-93 491 Main Street - Samuel Law
ca. 1807, Federal, clapboard, intact.
- B-92 492-494 Main Street - Centre Store
1830/ca.1850/ca. 1950, Italianate, clapboard, altered.
- B-91 497 Main Street - Stephen Weston
ca. 1836, Federal, clapboard, intact.
- B-90 498 Main Street - Charles Tuttle
ca. 1817, Federal, clapboard, intact.
- B-89 502 Main Street - William Lothrop
1849, Greek Revival, clapboard, intact.
- B-88 503 Main Street - Tuttle
ca. 1840, Greek Revival Cape, synthetic siding, altered.
- B-87 504 Main Street - The Chapel/Acton Woman's Club
1829, Federal/Greek Revival, brick, clapboard, intact.
- B-86 505 Main Street - Tuttle
ca. 1840, Greek Revival, clapboard, minor alterations.
- B-85 507 Main Street - Central District School/Walker/Holden
1798/1845, Greek Revival, clapboard, intact.
- B-84 508 Main Street - Dr. Harris Cowdry
1830/ca.1850, Greek Revival/Italianate, clapboard, intact.
- B-83 510 Main Street - Meeting House Hill
from 1737, site.
- B-82 511 Main Street - Morehouse
1874, Italianate, clapboard, rehabed.
- B-81 517 Main Street - Horatio H. Stearns
ca. 1850, Greco-Italianate, clapboard, intact.

NAGOG HILL ROAD

- B-121 74 Nagog Hill Road - James Fletcher
1828/moved 1889, Federal, clapboard, intact.
- B-122 77 Nagog Hill Road - Fletcher
ca. 1828/moved 1889, Italianate, asbestos, minor alterations.
- B-123 (nc) 78 Nagog Hill Road - unknown
1978, Colonial Revival, clapboard, intact.

- B-124 84 Nagog Hill Road - Jacob Hooker/Old Parsonage
ca. 1741/1792, Federal, clapboard, intact.

NEWTOWNE ROAD

- B-114 6 Newtown Road - Lothrop/Cyrus Hosmer
ca. 1851, Greek Revival, clapboard, intact.
- B-115 10 Newtowne Road - King-Despeaux/Sanders
ca. 1854, Greek Revival, clapboard, intact.
- B-116 14 Newtowne Road - Samuel Chaffin
ca. 1847, Greek Revival, clapboard, intact.
- B-117 15 Newtowne Road - Edmunds/Blood
ca. 1865, Greek Revival, synthetic siding, altered.

WOOD LANE

- B-125 1 Wood Lane - Second Evangelical Church Parsonage
1875, Second Empire, clapboard, intact.
- B-126 10 Wood Lane - Sael Jones, Esq.
1807, Federal, clapboard, intact.
- B-127 11 Wood Lane - Jones Blacksmith Shop Site
from ca. 1807-ca. 1833, site.

WOODBURY LANE

- B-118 12 Woodbury Lane - Wheeler
ca. 1865, Greco-Italiane, clapboard, intact.
- B-119 16 Woodbury Lane - First Evangelical Church Parsonage
ca. 1852, Greco-Italiane, pressed wood shingles, altered.
- B-120 17 Woodbury Lane - R.S. Wright
ca. 1850, Greek Revival, clapboard, minor alterations.

LOTS WITHOUT INVENTORY NUMBERS

- F3-4 Goward field (southern section)
- F3A-15 behind 494 Main Street (non-contributing outbuilding)
- F3A-21 Town parking lot

F3A-34-1	Vacant
F3A-41	Vacant
F3A-42	Vacant
F3A-43	Street
F3A-45	Vacant
F3A-45-1	Vacant
F3A-59	Vacant

WEST ACTON VILLAGE DISTRICT

Description of the Area

Located in the western part of Acton, the core of West Acton Village retains the character of a small-manufacturing, commercial and residential area that developed largely over the second half of the nineteenth century, after the railroad came through in 1844-45. The dominant building form is the wood-frame, gable-front type for both residential and commercial structures, most with modest Greek Revival and Italianate detail. Remarkably, the proposed West Acton Village District contains well-preserved examples of some extremely fragile building types. The multi-unit wood-frame "tenement", for instance, that was built at the end of the nineteenth century to rent to workers in the local industries, has two intact representatives at 520-526 Mass. Ave., and at 265-271 Arlington St., and even a little one-story utilitarian meat market of ca. 1900, now a law office, is located at 583 Mass. Ave. in the heart of the proposed district. The area also includes the town's greatest concentration of Queen Anne residences, several high-style Italianate buildings, one Second Empire villa, and a smattering of Second Empire-inspired cottage architecture.

By the end of the eighteenth century three major through-routes crossed at what is now the center of West Acton: today's Arlington Street, which was the main link between Acton Center and Stow, the north-south "County Road" (Central Street), and the "Harvard Turnpike" (Massachusetts Avenue, Route 111). The area was sparsely settled until after 1800, although a school, blacksmith and wheelwright shop were located here at the turn of the nineteenth century and scattered farmsteads, including a portion of the Isaac Davis Birthplace at 285 Arlington Street, existed in the periphery. Bradley Stone, a blacksmith, built a substantial brick residence in ca. 1832 at the intersection of the three streets (585 Mass. Ave.) and opened the first store in the vicinity. He and John Hoar of Boxborough persuaded the Fitchburg Railroad to locate a depot here when the tracks came through in 1844-45. This double accomplishment, the locating of both the railroad and an early depot here at the crossroads spurred the development of several local industries and also provided a ready means to transport apples and farm produce to urban markets. Commercial properties were erected nearby on Mass. Ave., and residential development spread quickly along the surrounding streets. By 1856 there were approximately thirty-five buildings in West Acton village, the bulk of them modest structures in the vernacular Greek Revival style.

Small manufacturing and business enterprises at mid-century included a tin shop and general store, housed in the gable-front Greek revival building at 578-90 Mass. Ave. The area's first church, the Italianate West Acton Baptist Church, was built in 1854 (592 Mass. Ave.).

Several businesses were founded on the products of the rich surrounding agricultural land - located not just in Acton, but in nearby Boxborough and Littleton. In the 1840's, brothers Oliver, Varnum and Adelbert Mead began a produce marketing business with an outlet in Boston, which lasted into the 1930's. Its storage facilities survive at 3-9 Spruce Street. In keeping with their success, Mead family members erected several elaborate houses over the years, ranging from

Acton's most high-style Second Empire residence at 264 Central Street (ca. 1872) to a large, perfectly preserved Craftsman bungalow of 1911 at 18 Wright Terrace. With apple-producing a major agricultural focus of the surrounding area, other businesses included the cider mills of Edwin C. Parker and Sons in the 1870's, and Robinson's Cider and Jelly Manufactory (1880's). Although both mills are gone, their owners' houses survive (see 544 Mass. Ave.).

Late in the nineteenth century, Luke, and later Arthur Blanchard's apple shipping business was begun. The houses of the Blanchards are located at 560-64 Mass. Ave. (a wide pedimented Greek Revival house of ca. 1850) and at 56 Windsor Ave. (one of Acton's finest Queen Anne villas, built like many others in the district by local master-builder John S. Hoar).

The second half of the nineteenth century saw the development of a number of other types of small factories, as well. Several were short lived, but others prospered with the ease of shipping made possible by the railroad. The first, Hall Brothers Pail and Churn Factory, opened in the buildings just south of the district in the early 1870's. Hall brothers' houses survive at 24 and 30 Windsor Avenue. The second major business here was the Knowlton Cigar Factory, begun in the 1870's by Franklin Knowlton, whose home remains at 525 Mass. Ave.

The success of Hall Brothers' and the Cigar Factory led in turn to further commercial and institutional development, and, predictably, to residential construction for those working in the local establishments. By 1900, a second church, the West Acton Universalist at 250 Central Street, had been built, as well as a hotel, other food stores, a piano dealer and Charles Robinson's "ladies' and men's furnishings" store at 536 Mass. Ave. The housing stock of the 1850's and '60's consisted largely of modest workers' cottages and farmhouses flanking the village center on Central Street and extending east on Mass. Ave. By 1900, however, most of the substantial residences of store owners and businessmen had appeared, in a variety of styles, and were concentrated on Mass. Ave. west of the village, and on West Acton's most stylish side street, Windsor Avenue. Notable are the houses of Charles Mead at 616 Mass. Ave., Arthur Blanchard at 53 Windsor Ave., and George Wright at 615 Mass. Ave.

The early twentieth century saw municipal improvements of a fire station (12 Windsor Ave.) and a street trolley. Two devastating fires in 1913 and 1922 destroyed a significant amount of the village's central core, however, including the railroad depot. The 1922 brick Mead Block at the corner of Windsor and Mass. Avenues, a building type unique in Acton, though common in other communities, partially addressed the loss, but an open area on the north side of the center remained for many years, and was eventually filled with small-scale mid-twentieth century commercial structures.

Aside from the four modern commercial buildings that stand today on the burned-out area, there are very few intrusions in the proposed West Acton district - a 1950's brick fire station at 258 Central Street and modern houses at 37 Windsor Avenue and 1 Wright Terrace. Several small parking lots are also scattered throughout the area. A few buildings, such as the 1889-1926 wood-frame storehouse on Spruce Street, have lost most of their character through alteration and some have lost some trim or been sheathed with synthetic siding, but most retain their historic form and detail to a remarkable degree.

WEST ACTON VILLAGE DISTRICT

Justification of Proposed Boundaries

The Acton Historic District Study Committee proposes a Chapter 40C Local Historic District for the most intact components of West Acton's village core: the nineteenth and early twentieth century residential and institutional development flanking the center east and west on Mass. Ave., Wright and Hillside Terraces and upper Arlington Street, and extending south on Central Street and Windsor Avenue, and the remaining commercial structures from the same period along Mass. Ave. between Spruce and Central Streets. In addition, because of their crucial position in the heart of the area, it is recommended that the four modern commercial structures on the burned-out area of Mass. Ave. be included as well.

The proposed district contains all of West Acton's historically significant commercial, civic, and religious buildings as well as residential architecture representing the full range of its major periods and types of development. Thus the proposed boundaries encompass those properties that best represent:

- the architectural fabric of a small late nineteenth/early twentieth century commercial/industrial village
- the historical context of the development of a secondary village center built around the railroad and the produce of surrounding farms
- a street pattern and collection of buildings illustrative of a major part of Acton's cultural and physical development.

DATA SHEETS FOR WEST ACTON VILLAGE DISTRICT

Properties in the West Acton Village district are listed alphabetically by street. Also included are the approximate date of construction, a brief description, historic name where applicable, and an assessment of condition. The condition assessment is stated in the context of the district, i.e. how well the property reflects, or is consistent with other area buildings in expressing the historic development of the community.

Each resource for which a Massachusetts Historical Commission inventory form has been written has an identification number; that number appears in the left-hand margin. Modern buildings that do not contribute to the historic character of a district are classified as non-contributing, and are marked "nc". Inventory forms are filed in the Acton Planning Department office, the Acton Historical Commission files, and at the Mass. Historical Commission.

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ARLINGTON STREET

- | | |
|-------|---|
| C-204 | 250-252 Arlington Street - unknown
ca. 1900, Colonial Revival, clapboard, intact. |
| C-206 | 265-271 Arlington Street - unknown
ca. 1900, Colonial Revival, asbestos shingles, altered. |
| C-207 | 276 Arlington Street - A.F. Hall (1875)
ca. 1860, Greek Revival, clapboards, minor alterations. |
| C-208 | 278 Arlington Street - W.E. Mead (1889)
ca. 1885, Shingle Style, clapboards, intact. |
| C-209 | 282-284 Arlington Street - unknown
ca. 1900, Italianate/Queen Anne, clapboards, intact. |
| C-210 | 285 Arlington Street - Isaac Davis Birthplace
ca. 1835, Federal/Greek Revival, clapboards, intact. |
| C-903 | 285 Arlington Street - Historic Marker
1900, granite, intact. |

CENTRAL STREET

- | | |
|------------|--|
| C-300 (nc) | 258 Central Street - Fire Station |
| C-299 | 264 (262-266) Central Street - Oliver W. Mead House (1872)
1872, Second Empire, clapboards, intact. |

- C-298 269 Central Street - Nathaniel S. Faulkner (1856)
ca. 1840, Federal/Greek revival, synthetic siding, altered.
- C-297 270-272 Central Street - Levi W. Stevens (1871)
ca. 1865, Italianate/Queen Anne, synthetic siding, altered.
- C-296 274 Central Street - Mrs. Blanchard (1856)
ca. 1850, Greek Revival, synthetic siding, minor alterations.
- C-295 275-279 Central Street - unknown
ca. 1920, Colonial Revival, clapboards, minor alterations.
- C-294 282 Central Street - Odd Fellows Hall
1906, Colonial Revival, clapboards, minor alterations.

HILLSIDE TERRACE

- C-293 7-9 Hillside Terrace - unknown
ca. 1915, Colonial Revival, clapboards, intact.

MASSACHUSETTS AVENUE

- C-247 520-526 Massachusetts Avenue - unknown
ca. 1895, Colonial Revival, clapboards, intact.
- C-246 525 Massachusetts Avenue - Franklin R. Knowlton (1889)
ca. 1880, Mansard cottage, clapboards, altered.
- C-245 531 Massachusetts Avenue - George Gardner's barn/warehouse (1860s)
ca. 1856, Greek Revival, clapboards, minor alterations.
- C-244 533 Massachusetts Avenue - George Gardner (1860s)
ca. 1855, Greco-Italianate, wood shingles, minor alterations.
- C-243 536 Massachusetts Avenue - Charles Robinson Store (1871)
ca. 1865, Greco-Italianate, clapboards, minor alterations.
- C-242 537 Massachusetts Avenue - unknown
ca. 1880, Italianate, clapboards, minor alterations.
- C-241 541 (539) Massachusetts Avenue - unknown
ca. 1870, Italianate, clapboards, major alterations.
- C-239 542 Massachusetts Avenue - unknown
ca. 1850, Greek Revival, clapboards, intact.
- C-238 543 Massachusetts Avenue - St. Elizabeth of Hungary
1913, English Parish, stucco, intact.

- C-237 544 Massachusetts Avenue - Charles Robinson (ca. 1865)
ca. 1865, Greco-Italianate, synthetic siding, altered.
- C-236 550 Massachusetts Avenue - Cyrus Hayward (1856)
ca. 1850, Greek Revival, clapboards, intact.
- C-235 (nc) 553 Massachusetts Avenue - Mobil Station
late 20th century.
- C-234 552-554 Massachusetts Avenue - Dr. Reuben Green (1848)
ca. 1845, Greek Revival, clpboards, minor alterations.
- C-233 (nc) 555 Massachusetts Avenue - Cumberland Farms
mid 20th Centrury, brick.
- C-232 556 Massachusetts Avenue - Dr. Isaiah Hutchins (1870)
ca. 1870, Greco-Italianate, synthetic siding, altered.
- C-231 560-564 Massachusetts Avenue - Luke Blanchard (1856)
ca. 1850, Greek Revival, sythetic siding, major alterations.
- C-230 (nc) 563 Massachusetts Avenue - Acton Pharmacy
mid 20th century, brick.
- C-229 568-570 Massachusetts Avenue - Mead Block
1922, Classical Revival, brick, minor alterations.
- C-227 (nc) 577 Massachusetts Avenue - Bank
late 20th century, brick.
- C-228 578-590 Massachusetts Avenue - C.H. Mead Store (and others)
ca 1850s, Greek Revival, clapboards, altered.
- C-226 583 Massachusetts Avenue - Waldo Whitcomb/meat market (1900s)
ca. 1900, Colonial Revival, asbestos shingles, minor alterations.
- C-225 585 Massachusetts Avenue - Bradley M. Stone House (1830s)
ca. 1832, Federal, brick, intact.
- C-224 592 Massachusetts Avenue - West Acton Baptist Church
1854, Italianate, synthetic siding, minor alteraations.
- C-223 603 Massachusetts Avenue - Stockwell (1856)
ca. 1850, Greek Revival, clapboards, minor alterations.
- C-222 608 Massachusetts Avenue - Parsonage (1870s)
1879, Italianate, clapboards, minor alterations.
- C-221 612 Massachusetts Avenue - unknown
ca. 1920s, Colonial Revival, synthetic siding, altered.

- C-220 615 Massachusetts Avenue - George C. Wright House (1861)
1861, Italianate, synthetic/clapboards, altered.
- C-219 616 Massachusetts Avenue - Charles H. Mead House (1880s)
ca. 1880, Queen Anne, clapboards/shingles, intact.
- C-217 627 Massachusetts Avenue - unknown
ca. 1885, Stick Style, clapboards/shingles, intact.
- C-216 631-637 Massachusetts Avenue - unknown
ca. 1885, Italianate/Stick Style, clapboard/shingle, intact.

SPRUCE STREET

- C/D-248 3,5,7-9 Spruce Street - A.O.W. Mead Co.
1889-1926, utilitarian, major alterations.

WINDSOR AVENUE

- C-259 9-15 Windsor Avenue - none
1922, Colonial Revival/Gambrel, synthetic siding, minor alterations.
- C-260 12 Windsor Avenue - West Acton Fire Station
1903, Colonial Revival, clapboards, minor alterations.
- C-261 21 Windsor Avenue - Citizen's Library
ca. 1840, Greek Revival Cape, clapboards, intact.
- C-262 24 Windsor Avenue - Edgar H. Hall (1889)
1889, Queen Anne, clapboards/shingles, intact.
- C-263 25 Windsor Avenue - James P. Clare (1920s)
ca. 1925, Bungalow, synthetic siding, minor alterations.
- C-264 29 Windsor Avenue - John Wetherbee (1840s)
ca. 1846, Greek Revival, clapboards, minor alterations.
- C-265 30 Windsor Avenue - Deleete H. Hall (1880s)
c. 1880, Italianate, clapboards, minor alterations.
- C-266 33 Windsor Avenue - unknown
c. 1880, Italianate, synthetic siding, altered.
- C-267 (nc) 37 Windsor Avenue - unknown
ca. 1940s, Cape, asbestos shingles, major alterations.
- C-268 38 Windsor Avenue - unknown
ca. 1880, Italianate, clapboards, minor alterations.

- C-269 44 Windsor Avenue - Lois Wetherbee (1849)
ca. 1845, Greek Revival, clapboards, minor alterations.
- C-270 43 Windsor Avenue - Bertram D. Hall (1897)
1897, Queen Anne, clapboards/shingles, intact.
- C-271 46 Windsor Avenue - unknown
1890, Queen Anne, clapboards/shingles, intact.
- C-272 48 Windsor Avenue - unknown
ca. 1890, Queen Anne, synthetic siding, minor alterations.
- C-273 49 Windsor Avenue - John S. Hoar, Jr. (1891)
1891, Queen Anne, clapboards/shingles, intact.
- C-274 53 Windsor Avenue - Hobart Mead (1902)
ca. 1890, Colonial Revival/Four Square, clapboards, minor alterations.
- C-275 56 Windsor Avenue - Arthur Blanchard (1892)
1892, Queen Anne, clapboards/shingles, intact.
- C-276 57 Windsor Avenue - unknown
1897, Queen Anne, clapboards/shingles, intact.
- C-277 59-61 Windsor Avenue - Nancy & John Vose (1902)
ca. 1892, Queen Anne, synthetic siding, altered.
- C-278 62 Windsor Avenue - Webster S. Blanchard (1920s)
ca. 1925, Colonial Revival/Gambrel, clapboards, intact.

WRIGHT TERRACE

- (nc) 1 Wright Terrace
- C-214 12 Wright Terrace - Lowell H. Cram (1922)
1922, Colonial Revival, clapboards/shingles, intact.
- C-215 18 Wright Terrace - George V. Mead (1911)
1911, Craftsman Bungalow, wood shingles, intact.

LOTS WITHOUT INVENTORY NUMBERS

- F2A-131 Parking Lot
- F2A-40 Vacant Lot
- F2A-76 Vacant Lot
- F2A-86 Town Park, with horse trough

F2A-100	Parking Lot
F2A-129	Parking Lot
F2A-140	Gardner Field

SOUTH ACTON VILLAGE DISTRICT

Description of the Area

Located in the south part of the Town of Acton, South Acton Village developed as an industrial village at "Mill Corner" (where Main Street intersects with High, Maple, School and Central Streets) in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries around the water and waterpower of Fort Pond Brook and the Mill Pond. Two early major transportation routes were established along the brook in an east/west direction, east along School Street to Concord and west along Central Street. The north/south route through Acton was Main Street (today's Route 27).

The proposed South Acton Village Local Historic District consists of approximately 65 properties (as further identified on the enclosed map and historic data sheets). The proposed northern boundary is just north of the intersections of Railroad and School Streets with Main Street, with Jones Tavern on the west side of Main and the Abram Jones residence (129-131 Main) on the east side of Main, a ca. 1860 Italianate dwelling of the historically important (for commercial ventures) Jones family. The original commercial buildings of the village were located along Main and School Streets with prime examples being two National Register listed structures: Jones Tavern (128 Main Street) and Exchange Hall (4-6 School Street). Jones Tavern (1732/1818) is one of the best local examples of Federal architecture with its two traditional 5-bay, 2 1/2 story, center entrance facades. It is currently under renovation by its not-for-profit owner, The Iron Work Farm in Acton, Inc., and will serve as a museum and research center. Exchange Hall, a monumental 4 1/2 story Greek Revival/Italianate structure built in 1860 is still in commercial use. It was the principal site of one of Acton's most important businesses run by Tuttle, Jones & Wetherbee selling groceries, dry goods, furniture and clothing.

Along Main Street are early residences connected with Mill Corner's history. Most are modest vernacular Greek Revival houses built at the time the railroad was laid through Acton (1844). The District's proposed southern boundary is at 94 and 95 Main Street. The focal point of the area south of Fort Pond Brook is the earliest house in Acton, the National-Register-listed Faulkner House (5 High Street, built ca. 1707). This is the best preserved First Period house in the area combining elements from its First Period construction such as an attic gable-end overhang, with a later Georgian facade. This structure is also owned by The Iron Work Farm in Acton, Inc. and is open to the public as a house museum.

South Acton Village's notable reference points are the waters of the Mill Pond and Fort Pond Brook and the railroad line. These also provide the east/west orientation of the proposed district. Most of South Acton's water-powered mill buildings have been lost to fire; however the district is bounded by the two most successful mill sites (Faulkner's Mill and Lothrop's Wire Ferrule Mill) each of which has retained some of its original flavor.

In 1701 Ephraim and Samuel Jones and Jonathan Knight purchased part of the Concord Iron Work Farm and established the town's first fulling mill on Fort Pond

Brook (Main and High Streets). This mill, first called Jones Mill (and from 1742 Faulkner's Mill) was converted in 1848 to grind fertilizer. Now Erikson's Grain Mill (113 Main Street), it is still a thriving commercial establishment (selling feed and fertilizer). Today the complex includes old foundations, remnants of 19th century buildings and an 1848 granite block dam. The Mill Pond provides the west boundary of the proposed district.

At the eastern boundary of the district is a mill site which began in 1831 with Lewis Wood's woodturning shop. Window sash, piano stools, wire ferrules were produced in succeeding buildings on the site until after World War II. Today, wood products are still produced in the remaining 1902 buildings of Lothrop's wire ferrule mill (81 River Street).

North of Fort Pond Brook on School, River and Chadwick Streets, the district includes residences of the thriving mill and commercial business owners, as well as the humbler dwellings of mill and retail employees. There are six non-contributing buildings in the District.

SOUTH ACTON VILLAGE DISTRICT

Justification of Proposed Boundaries

South Acton Village, once part of the 1,000 acre farm granted to Concord's Major Simon Willard, was sold to Ephraim and Samuel Jones and Jonathan Knight in 1701. The town of Acton began in South Acton at "Mill Corner" around the water - Fort Pond Brook and its Mill Pond with the development of a fulling mill and other enterprises by these three partners. They also built their homes nearby, one, Ephraim Jones' house, overlooking the mill (Faulkner House) is included in the district.

Eighteenth century "Mill Corner" consisted of the Jones (later Faulkner) Mills (113 Main Street), the Faulkner House (1701) (5 High Street), Jones Tavern (1732) (128 Main Street) and cider mill (127 Main Street). The original fulling mill was used for the washing and fulling of textiles until 1848 when the building was converted to a grinding mill for fertilizer. Mill buildings on this site have continued in commercial use for almost three centuries. The Faulkner House was built for Ephraim Jones and was purchased by Ammi Ruhamah Faulkner in 1742. Locally important members of the Faulkner family include Captain Francis Faulkner who led the West Militia Company to Concord in 1775, and Winthrop and Winthrop E. Faulkner who expanded the mill businesses in South Acton. Jones Tavern, originally built in 1732 as a residence for Samuel Jones Jr., son of the same-named mill founder, was expanded in 1750 to accommodate a store and tavern to serve overnight travelers. It received its federal facade in an 1818 renovation. It continued with this mixed residential/commercial use until 1845, when James Tuttle further expanded the store. Later in the century after the store moved to more modern premises, the building became the center for the Jones family dairy farm.

While water and its power determined the early development of South Acton Village, it was the coming of the railroad from Boston to Fitchburg, through both South and West Acton villages in 1844-1845 which established these centers as excellent examples of 19th century New England villages with a solid industrial and commercial base. The coming of the railroad resulted in the development of additional mills, a hotel, commercial businesses and residences for prosperous mill and business owners and their numerous employees. The number of buildings in 1831 had more than tripled by 1856. The end of Jones Tavern's hostelry business in 1845 signalled the opening of a hotel later to be called The American Hotel (19 Railroad Street, just west of the district) which was enlarged in the 1860's in the Second Empire style and prospered throughout the 19th century. James Tuttle who took over the store in Jones Tavern in 1845 was highly successful, expanded and developed other neighboring businesses and in 1860 with two business partners (his brother Varnum Tuttle and brother-in-law Elnathan Jones Jr.) built the monumental Exchange Hall (4-6 School Street). Within this Greek Revival and Italianate 4 1/2 story structure and its associated buildings across School Street (now gone) one could purchase dry goods, furniture and groceries and attend lectures by Henry David Thoreau or Henry Ward Beecher, meetings of the Universalist Society or local dances. The structure, a focal point of the district, continues in commercial use.

South Acton's two churches, the 1878 Stick Style Universalist Church (140 Main Street, just north of the proposed district bounds) and the 1892 Shingle Style Congregational Church (29 School Street) still survive.

The most frequent inquiries to the Acton Historical Commission are made with respect to the Michael Hannon residence (91 River Street) at the eastern end of the district. Michael's daughter, Josephine Hannon Fitzgerald, the mother of Rose Fitzgerald Kennedy, grew up here. The house, originally located on the Hannon farm south of 1 River Street (across the brook) was moved to its present location in the 1899.

Since most of South Acton Village was developed by the beginning of the twentieth century, it provides a mini-course of 19th century architectural building styles in New England with First Period, Federal, Greek Revival, Second Empire, Queen Anne, Italianate, Stick and Shingle styles all represented. Fires, some insensitive renovations and limited twentieth century infill building have accounted for some change in character in the area.

DATA SHEETS FOR SOUTH ACTON VILLAGE DISTRICT

Properties in the South Acton district are listed alphabetically by street. Also included are the approximate date of construction, a brief description, historic name where applicable, and an assessment of condition. The condition assessment is stated in the context of the district, i.e. how well the property reflects, or is consistent with other area buildings in expressing the historic development of the community.

Each resource for which a Massachusetts Historical Commission inventory form has been written has an identification number; that number appears in the left-hand margin. Modern buildings that do not contribute to the historic character of a district are classified as non-contributing, and are marked "nc". Inventory forms are filed in the Acton Planning Department office, the Acton Historical Commission files, and at the Mass. Historical Commission.

Uninventoried lots within the district boundaries are listed by assessor's map and parcel number at the end of each data sheet.

CHADWICK STREET

- F-530 5 Chadwick Street - Asaph Merriam
1892, Italianate/Queen Anne, asbestos shingles, minor alterations.
- F-532 11-15 Chadwick Street - Francis Dwight
ca. 1858, Greco-Italianate, synthetic siding, major alterations.

HIGH STREET

- F-490 5 High Street - Faulkner Homestead
ca. 1707, First Period, clapboard, intact.

MAIN STREET

- F-431 94 Main Street - George Gates
ca. 1867, Greco-Italianate, clapboard, major alterations.
- F-430 95 Main Street - Edward Richardson
ca. 1872, Italianate-Queen Anne, clapboard/shingle, intact.
- F-429 95 (97) Main Street - Edward Richardson
ca. 1872, Italianate/Queen Anne, clapboard, intact.
- F-429 96 Main Street - Ithamar Robbins
ca. 1850, Greek Revival, clapboard, intact.
- F-428 99 Main Street - Marshall V. Stone
1853-1854, gable end, synthetic siding, major alterations.

- F-427 100 Main Street - unknown
ca. 1920, Cape Cod cottage, clapboard, minor alterations.
- F-426 101 Main Street - Charles Brooks
1843-1846, Cape Cod, clapboard, minor alterations.
- F-425 102 Main Street - wheelwright's shop
ca. 1855, utilitarian, clapboard, minor alterations.
- F-424 103 Main Street - Lemuel Hildreth
1846, Federal/Greek Revival, clapboard, intact.
- F-423 104 Main Street - Marshall Stone
ca. 1852, Greek Revival, clapboard, major alterations.
- F-422 105-107 Main Street - "Faulkner Double House"
1844, Greek Revival/Italianate, clapboard, intact.
- F-421 106 Main Street - blacksmith shop
ca. 1845/ca.1910, Cape Cod, shingle, major alterations.
- F/H
418-420 113 Main Street - Jones / Faulkner Mills
mid 19th c., utilitarian, brick and clapboard, major alterations.
- F-905 Off Main Street - Dam on Fort Pond Brook
1848, granite, disrepair.
- F-906 Main Street - Bridge
1906, metal structure.
- F-417 124 Main Street - Central Hall
1852, Italianate, clapboard, minor alterations.
- F-416 127 Main Street - Jones Cider Mill
ca. 1860, gable front utilitarian, clapboard, minor alterations.
- F-415 128 Main Street - Jones Tavern
1732/1818, Federal, clapboard, intact.
- F-414 129-131 Main Street - Abram Jones
ca. 1860, Italianate, clapboard, minor alterations.

RIVER STREET

- F-533 1 River Street - George W. Worster
1894, Queen Anne, clapboard, intact.
- F-534 20 River Street - J. Everett Reed
1873, Greco-Italianate, asbestos shingles, minor alterations.

- F-535 24-26 River Street - Charles Harrington (rental)
1892-1896, Colonial Revival, clapboard, minor alterations.
- F-536 50 River Street - J.A. Holmes & Co.
ca. 1872, Greco-Italianate, clapboard, intact.
- F-537 (nc) 53 River Street - Lazaro Paving Co.
1957, utilitarian, concrete, major alterations.
- F-538 62 River Street - George W. Rand
1861, Greco-Italianate, clapboard, minor alterations.
- F-539 65 River Street - Francis Dwight
c. 1860, Greco-Italianate, clapboard, minor alterations.
- F-540 81 River Street - Lewis Wood Mill Privilege
c. 1830-2-ca.1910s, utilitarian, alterations.
- F-561 91 River Street - Michael Hannon (Josephine Hannon Fitzgerald)
ca. 1850, moved ca. 1890s, gable end, synthetic siding, altered.

SCHOOL STREET

- F-493 3 School Street - South Acton Fire Department
1927, Dutch Colonial, stucco, minor alterations.
- F-494 4-6 School Street - Exchange Hall
1860, Greek Revival/Italianate, clapboard, minor alterations.
- F-495 12 School Street - Varnum Tuttle
1856, Greco-Italianate, shingles, minor alterations.
- F-496 20 School Street - William H. Gray
1856, Greek Revival (altered), shingles, major alterations.
- F-497 25 School Street - Nelson Cole
ca. 1910, neo-Greek Revival, clapboard, minor alterations.
- F-498 26 School Street - James E. Harris
1860/ca.1900, Greco-Italianate, asbestos, minor alterations.
- F-499 27 School Street - Dwight's Block
1848/1873, Greek Revival (altered), clapboard, major alterations.
- F-500 29-31 School Street - South Acton Congregational Church
1891-1892, Queen Anne, clapboard, intact.
- F-501 28-30 School Street - Joseph Warren Tuttle
1875, Italianate, clapboard, intact.

- F-502 34 School Street - Abel Jones
1845, Greek Revival, clapboard, intact.
- F-503 39 School Street - Francis Conant (rental)
1890, Colonial Revival, shingles, minor alterations.
- F-504 40 School Street - George Ames
1880, Italianate, clapboard, intact.
- F-505 43-45 School Street - Francis Conant (rental)
1890, Colonial Revival, pressed shingles, major alterations.
- F-506 47 School Street - Francis Conant (rental)
1856-1868, Greco-Italianate, clapboard, minor alterations.
- F-507 48 School Street - James Francis Jones
1856-1861, Greco-Italianate, synthetic siding, major alterations
- F-508 49-51 School Street - Francis Conant (rental)
1856-1868, Greek Revival Cape, synthetic siding, major alterations.
- F-509 (nc) 52 School Street - South Acton Fire Station
1962, utilitarian, brick, intact.
- F-510 53 School Street - Jonathan K.W. Wetherbee
ca. 1860, Greco-Italianate, clapboard, intact.
- F-511 55 School Street - Hiram Butters
185, Greco-Italianate, clapboard, minor alterations.
- F-512 60 School Street - Guilford D/ Flether
ca. 1870, Italianate, shingles, minor alterations.
- F-513 64 School Street - "Sunshine Villa"
1893, Queen Anne, synthetic siding, altered.
- F-514 65 School Street - Charles Harrington (rental)
1882-1886, Italianate, clapboard, minor alterations.
- F-515 66 School Street - Abel G. Haynes
1861, Greek Revival, clapboard, intact.
- F-516 70 School Street - Howard B. White
1888, Queen Anne/Colonial Revival, clapboard, altered.
- F-517 69-71 School Street - Charles Harrington (rental)
1880-1886, Greek Revival/Italianate, clapboard, minor alterations.
- F-518 75 School Street - James R. Harvey
ca. 1845, Greek Revival Cape, clapboard, minor alterations.

- F-519 (nc) 76 School Street - unknown
ca. 1960, Cape Cod, clapboard, intact.
- F-520 80 School Street - Jabez Walcott
ca. 1846, Gothic Revival, clapboard, minor alterations.
- F-521 81 School Street - Samuel Richardson
1843-1845, Greek Revival Cape, synthetic siding, minor alterations.
- F-522 (nc) 85 School Street - unknown
ca. 1951 modern, stucco, intact.
- F-524 (nc) 87 School Street - unknown
ca. 1960, modern ranch, clapboard/brick, intact.
- F-526 (nc) 95 School Street - unknown
1973, modern ranch, clapboard, intact.
- F-527 105 School Street - Ezra Wheeler
ca. 1760, Georgian/Greek Revival, clapboard, intact.
- F-528 111-113 School Street - Alvin M. Lothrop
1900, Shingle Style, shingles, minor alterations.
- F-529 115 School Street - Frank Merriam
1896, Greek Revival/Italianate, clapboard, intact.

LOTS WITHOUT INVENTORY NUMBERS

- H2A-52 Vacant Lot
- H2A-80 Vacant Lot
- H2A-81 Vacant Lot
- H3A-38 Vacant Lot
- H3A-38-1 Vacant Lot
- H3A-39 Vacant Lot
- H3A-44 Vacant Lot
- H3A-46 Vacant Lot
- H3A-48 Vacant Lot
- H3A-49 Vacant Lot

PROPOSED ACTON HISTORIC DISTRICTS BYLAW

September, 1990

Introduction

Acton, like many communities in the Commonwealth, has undergone considerable growth and change over the past several decades. With the changes have come benefits to the town's citizens. At the same time, residents have become increasingly concerned over the continued threat of losing much of the town's historic small-town New England character. The Historic Districts Act of 1960, also known as Chapter 40C of the Massachusetts General Laws, (amended 1975 and 1983,) was passed to help address just this type of situation. Its stated purpose is to preserve and protect the distinctive characteristics of buildings and places significant in the history of the state or its cities and towns, to maintain and improve their settings, and to encourage new building designs compatible with the existing architecture.

Under Chapter 40C, communities are empowered to enact an ordinance or bylaw creating Local Historic Districts to protect the character of areas which possess historic, aesthetic, and/or cultural importance. Such districts are administered by locally appointed Historic District Commissions which oversee and review substantial changes to the exteriors of buildings, sites, and structures located within those districts. Since the early 1960's, Local Historic Districts have been established in over ninety Massachusetts cities and towns, where they function as one of the most effective historic preservation tools available.

Background

The Acton Historic District Study Committee was appointed by the Board of Selectmen in September of 1989 to investigate the feasibility of establishing Local Historic Districts in Acton. The committee's formation follows other recent measures that address the distinct needs and characteristics of our historic town centers. Over the past several years, for instance, special Village Zoning Districts have been created for the centers of West, South, and East Acton, and much of Acton Center has been listed on the National Register.

Neither zoning nor National Register listing, however, can adequately address the concerns over the loss of historic character expressed by citizens in recent years. During the Master Plan public meetings of 1989-90, one of the goals most frequently raised by residents was the preservation of Acton's small-town New England qualities, with a particular focus on the architectural environment of the village centers. In fact, in a 1989 survey, over eighty per cent of respondents favored Historic Districting for those areas. In their spoken and written comments, people expressed dismay over a wide range of changes, including radical alterations that chipped away at an area's character when repeated on building after building, the intrusion of new structures that were incompatible with the surrounding older architecture, and even the loss of entire historic buildings.

In response to this community-wide desire for historic preservation in our town centers, the Acton Historic District Study Committee has prepared a draft Bylaw for consideration at the fall Special Town Meeting on November 28. Copies of the proposed Bylaw and the Study Committee's Preliminary Report are available for review at the Planning Department office at Town Hall. The function of this pamphlet is to present the most important points of the By-law and its designation of Local Historic Districts.

BYLAW SUMMARY

The proposed Historic Districts Bylaw would create three Chapter 40C Local Historic Districts, to be located in the core areas of West Acton, South Acton, and Acton Center. The Bylaw would establish the general framework for the administration of the districts by a Historic District Commission. It would also outline the types of changes to properties in a District which would fall under the Commission's jurisdiction, and establish procedures for the appeal of actions taken by the Commission.

As in all Chapter 40C Local Historic Districts, the Acton Bylaw would require that a certificate from the Historic District Commission be issued before significant exterior changes can be made to a property. Certificates usually fall into three types--a certificate of appropriateness, which shows that the Commission has found that a proposed alteration under its jurisdiction is appropriate in or compatible with the character of the historic district, a certificate of non-applicability, which is issued when a proposed change is not subject to review by the Commission, or a certificate of hardship, which can be issued for certain types of changes in cases of financial hardship.

Bylaw options

Under the strictest of the Local Historic Districts that have been established in Massachusetts, the Historic District Commission can review nearly all exterior changes to any building or structure located in a District. The Acton Historic District Study Committee, however, has chosen certain options available under Chapter 40C which would make the District Commission's powers of review less restrictive. These options have allowed us to propose the following limitations on the Commission's review powers:

- review would be limited to exterior changes visible only from the street on which a property has its primary frontage.
- many types of exterior changes would be excluded from the Commission's review, such as terraces, walks and driveways, small or temporary signs, storm and screen windows and doors, window air conditioners, temporary structures, and the color of paint and roofing materials. (Chapter 40-C already exempts interior changes and landscaping with plants, as well as ordinary maintenance, repairs, or in-kind replacement of architectural features from Commission review.)

Changes requiring Commission Review

Chapter 40C requires that a Historic District Commission **must** review certain categories of buildings, structures, and architectural features in a Local Historic District. A few examples of these categories are:

- additions, demolitions, porches, chimneys, outbuildings, window replacement, solar panels, and swimming pools.

In addition, the Study Committee has recommended that walls and fences, exterior lighting fixtures, and antennae also be reviewed by a Historic District Commission.

The Study Committee also intends to recommend that the Historic District Commission establish streamlined review procedures for many types of changes. Commissions in other communities have developed lists of certain features that, if built according to certain guidelines, will receive automatic approval.

Effect on Property Use, Rights, and Values

A Historic Districts Bylaw affects only the exterior design of a building, site, or structure. It does not affect the use of a property--that is the function of the Zoning Bylaw, not Historic Districting.

The purpose of the proposed Bylaw is to preserve the historical and architectural integrity of Acton's three most intact village centers. It is not meant to strip owners, tenants, or businesses of their property rights. The Chapter 40C enabling legislation was carefully written to preserve those rights, and has functioned successfully in a broad variety of districts and communities for over thirty years.

In fact, in the experience of most communities with similar bylaws, properties located in Local Historic Districts have shown a tendency to increase in value over others, indicating the function of the District as a stabilizing force in an area. Historic Districts have also tended to attract businesses, which have consistently found that shoppers are drawn there because of the area's unique character. Perhaps most important of all, designation of a Local Historic District implies that a town believes an area to be special, with architectural and historical importance worth retaining and preserving.

The Acton Historic District Study Committee welcomes the comments of all Acton citizens as it finalizes its proposal for Town Meeting. Please make your ideas known to the Committee--we need your input and we seek your support.

Edward Adelman
Richard Boast
Elizabeth Conant
Anita Dodson
Anne Forbes, (Chair)
Wayne Freidrichs
Doré Hunter

Susan Master-Karnik, (Vice-chair)
Whit Mowry
Sandra Schmidt, (Clerk)

Ex officio:
Roland Bartl, Town Planner